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VIRGIL *ECLOGUES* 4.49

The common phrase *auctus filio* would seem to show that *incrementum* is most naturally interpreted as "child," an increase to the family.

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## A LOST PLATONIC JOKE

Many of Plato's knavish speeches sleep in the unapprehending ears of his commentators. And the ponderous levity of the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Philebus* is sometimes, as George Eliot might say, a great strain on the affections of his admirers. But, though modern philology may not always see or appreciate the joke, it ought at least to recognize the intention. The text by which I propose to illustrate and enforce this moral is *Politicus* 266C. Plato is there expressing his amusement at the ironical indifference of scientific classification to distinctions that reflect only the pretensions and the pride of man. In the subdivision of land animals the logic of dichotomy at one stage brackets the man and the pig. Or, as Plato puts it, humanity is paired and comes out of the race neck and neck with the sturdiest and most unfastidious (least finical) of creatures: *Τὰνθρώπινον ἡμῶν ἅμα γένος συνελ-  
ληχὸς καὶ συνδεδραμηκὸς γένοι τῷ τῶν ὄντων γενναιοτάτῳ καὶ ἅμα εὐχερεστάτῳ.*

Jowett, outdoing the Aristophanic *ὄνον ὄρνιν*, converts Plato's pig into a bird and renders, "Human beings have come out in the same class with the freest and airiest of creatures."

An Italian scholar who retains the pig but finds no pertinency in *εὐχερεστάτῳ* emends to *εὐτρεφεστάτῳ*, "fattest,"<sup>1</sup> an epithet which "nobody can deny" to the pig.

My suspicions thus aroused, I found without looking farther than Liddell and Scott and Jowett's translation that Hellenists who think in English have failed to apprehend the meaning and semasiological development of *εὐχερής* and its homonyms, which have no single English equivalent. Hence this note.

The etymological fallacy switches Liddell and Scott on to the wrong track from the start: *εὐχέρεια* = *εὐχειρία*, "dexterity," Plat. *Rep.* 426D; Arist. *H.A.* 7. 10; Plat. *Leg.* 942D; cf. *Alc.* I. 122C. They relegate to a second place the passage which gives the real feeling of the word for the readers of Aeschylus and Plato, the *locus classicus* *Eumenides* 495:

πάντας ἤδη τόδ' ἔργον εὐχερεί-  
α ξυναρμόσει βροτοῖς.

Commentators have rendered *εὐχέρεια* here correctly enough "license" and illustrated it by Plat. *Rep.* 391E: *πολλὴν εὐχέρειαν . . . πονηρίας*, "laxity

<sup>1</sup> *Bollettino di Filologia Classica*, 1911-12, pp. 53-55.